

Protesters Jeer Kremlin Leaders In May Day March

By David Remnick
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MOSCOW, May 1—Waving their fists and jeering the Kremlin leadership, tens of thousands of Muscovites today transformed the traditional May Day celebration of "socialist labor" on Red Square into a stunning rebuke of Bolshevik power.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev seemed transfixed at times as the parade, once a tightly controlled ritual of hollow hurrahs, suddenly became a boisterous demonstration of popular anger and protest. Some demonstrators carried Lithuanian and Czarist-era Russian flags, and a few even displayed Soviet flags with the gold hammer and sickle ripped out.

As Gorbachev and the rest of the Moscow leadership watched from a reviewing stand on the Lenin Mausoleum, the demonstrators hoisted placards expressing disdain for Kremlin policy and ideology.

"The Blockade of Lithuania Is the President's Shame!" "Socialism? No Thanks!" "Communists: Have No Illusions. You Are Bankrupt." "Marxism-Leninism Is on the Rubbish Heap of History." "Down With the Politburo! Resign!"

It was a stunning drama played out on the cobblestones of Red Square—the Soviet Union's most resonant political stage. As the Kremlin loudspeakers boomed out government slogans and marching music, the demonstrators shouted their discontent for the first time to Gorbachev's face. A bearded Russian Orthodox priest in the parade carried a seven-foot-high crucifix and shouted, "Mikhail Sergeyevich, Christ Has Risen!"

For the first time, the Kremlin opened up the May Day demonstration this year, allowing unofficial groups and parties to join the pa-

rade. The capital's new mayor, radical economist Gavril Popov, stood alongside the Kremlin leaders on the mausoleum.

The transition from orchestrated enthusiasm to genuine political feeling provided the most startling public evidence yet that Gorbachev's popularity, especially among urban intellectuals and young people, has plunged and that the Communist Party is rapidly losing ground to disparate movements and competing political parties.

"Ceausescus of the Politburo: Out of Your Armchairs and Onto the Prison Floors!" the placards read. "Gorbachev Is the Chief Patron of the Mafia!" "Let the Communist Party Live at Chernobyl!" "Down With Empire and Red Fascism!" "Down With the Cult of Lenin!"

In earlier times, the May Day crowds were compelled to carry giant portraits of the Politburo leaders. Today the two portraits most in evidence were those of the late human rights campaigner Andrei Sakharov and the maverick politician Boris Yeltsin.

Gorbachev, the politician who originally set all these forces around him into motion, watched the spectacle for about 25 minutes and then headed down the mausoleum steps and into the Kremlin. The rest of the leadership, as well as guests from labor unions and the Moscow City Council, quickly followed Gorbachev's lead. But the demonstration still continued.

"We were all stunned. It's as if Gorbachev decided to turn his back on the voices of the people," said one marcher, Alexander Afanasyev, a leader of the new students' Social Democratic movement. "The leadership may try to dismiss what happened here today as just some extremists blowing off a little steam,

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but it runs deeper. Gorbachev has done a lot of good, but when it comes to us, the radicals, he turns away from his natural allies."

Soviet television gave extensive coverage to the first hour of the parade, which was dominated by trade unions and workers carrying far more conservative banners, including "Down With Private Property." But once the wave of radicals began, the broadcast ended rather abruptly.

When the parade finally ended, two veterans of World War II in their seventies, their chests ablaze with rows of medals and ribbons, stopped at a vending machine near the Lenin Museum to buy glasses of mineral water. They were disgusted with the morning's spectacle, depressed at what modern times had come to.

"As far as I'm concerned, it was just organized slander, an insult to the Communist Party and everything we've ever stood for," said Nikolai Alexeyev. "It shows Gorbachev has no control."

"They just spit on us," said Vassily Estratov. "They spit on the party, the army."

In other Soviet cities, the atmosphere was at least as charged as in Moscow. In Lvov, the center of the Ukrainian independence movement, demonstrators carried icons of the Virgin Mary and signs saying, "USSR: The Prison House of Nations." They cheered former political prisoner Vyacheslav Chornovil, who is now the mayor of Lvov. Crowds in the Moldavian capital, Kishinev, carried Romanian, not Soviet, flags.

In Leningrad, where Vladimir Lenin began the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, city officials cancelled the May Day parade entirely, but independent political groups held a rally.

Last year, there were unofficial May Day rallies in many Soviet cities. But what made this year's events so significant, in Moscow especially, was that marginal protests once barely tolerated had taken center stage. The demonstrations on Pushkin Square and Luzhniki Stadium had suddenly arrived at the Kremlin.

The range of groups was extraordinary: Anarcho-Syndicalists, Constitutional Democrats, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Democratic Platform, Democratic Union and many others. Afterward, young activists distributed dozens of independent newspapers and magazines, some of them printed on hand-cranked mimeograph machines. Some featured lampoons and cartoons of the Kremlin politicians.

Gorbachev may have been embittered by the intensity of today's demonstrations on

Red Square, but he was well aware that such forces would gain confidence and strength this year, especially after the party gave up its constitutionally guaranteed power.

The morning began rather calmly on Red Square. The loudspeakers churned out treacly Soviet pop tunes and Pete Seeger's "We'll See That Day Come Round."

Once Gorbachev and the rest of the leadership assembled on the Lenin Mausoleum, the parade began with a series of speeches. In each one, the speaker echoed the current hesitant line on economic reform: that radical measures were needed, but that social guarantees must somehow be protected as well. In private recently, Gorbachev has talked about the need for privatization of Soviet industries, but his advisers say that his lack of political support prevents such radical, quick changes.

Many of the unions' and workers' signs reflected the great fear among the working class that a transfer to a market economy will bring about spiraling inflation and un-

employment. "Enough Experiments," said one banner, "Give Us Work." Another said, "A Market Economy Is Just Power to the Plutocracy!"

For a long time it seemed as if this May Day would not be much different from earlier ones in the Gorbachev era. The atmosphere was far less oppressive than in the Brezhnev period, but not quite in touch with the spirit of unofficial demonstrations.

But suddenly, as marchers carrying the red, yellow and green Lithuanian flag came into view, it was obvious that another era was about to begin on Red Square.

"I've been forced to go to these rallies for years, and this is the first time I've come voluntarily, acting from my own soul," said Vitali Mindlin, who carried a pro-Lithuanian banner. "Gorbachev may have been insulted by our openness, but we have to take that risk. One can no longer afford to act like someone's subjects. We are our own masters. The people dictate the moment now, not Gorbachev."